



Tradition and technology combine to win market share

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Paul Cleary Sales & Marketing Director



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Elliott Brothers Ltd., the Hampshire based builders' merchant, has a history stretching back 164 years as a family business, with a reputation built on excellent customer service from its local branches.

With this background it would be easy to jump to the conclusion that Elliotts are a conservative company, however its recent investment in Sales Intelligence software from Vecta shows that appearances can be deceptive and proves that even the age old good practice of understanding what your customers need, can benefit from an injection of modern technology.

Data overload

Late in 2005, having increased its sales and marketing capacity, Elliotts was seeking ways to maximise its sales. Most builders have accounts with more than one merchant, so each time the sales team called or made a visit they were competing against the builder's ability to buy elsewhere to suit their project schedule. Elliotts knew that the most cost effective way to grow its share of the builder's project budget was to arrive at sales meetings armed with both the right offers and a mix of products to suit the timing of the project.

Elliotts also wanted to convert unprofitable 'cherry-picking' customers, who would perhaps only order low-margin 'heavy-side' materials, by offering more value-add products with the order and thereby improving the up-sell opportunities.

The sales team wanted the ability to instantly identify at what stage of construction a build was, so that they could get in touch with details & samples of the products that would be required next. For example if a customer has bought bricks and blocks, they are putting up a building, but if they have not yet ordered roof trusses, the sales person needs to know and make a call about when trusses will be required. Too early and it could be an annoyance, too late and the sale may have been lost to another supplier.

In common with every other merchant, the principal problem facing Elliotts was one of information; understanding purchasing patterns could increase sales opportunities but the information available via the ERP accounting system was completely unsuitable. Pages of analysis and historical transactional data relating to invoicing has its uses but what the sales team needs is for that mass of data to be translated into actionable 'nuggets' of information, and this needs to happen fast.

Sales Intelligence

Elliotts Sales and Marketing Director Paul Cleary turned to sales intelligence specialists Vecta Software for a solution. Cleary said, "When we looked at VECTA we had recently increased our sales and marketing operation and, compared to the competition, it offered us a more complete solution, making it very easy to uncover customer drift or potential sales opportunities. Unlike the majority of solutions out there, VECTA is far more geared to selling to a customer base than a traditional CRM or contact management system. It also addresses the specific needs and best practices of sales and marketing teams in our industry, which generic Business Intelligence tools do not.

VECTA Sales Intelligence provides sales staff and managers with a comprehensive view of all customer and sales activities. The software monitors and analyses customer buying patterns and identifies missed sales opportunities. By highlighting such trends and issues the software enables sales professionals to better prepare for calls and switch from reactive or "milk round" sales to intelligent proactive selling.

Cleary himself uses VECTA "...all the time." Extracting data for reports and planning, he anticipates that eventually the system will eliminate the need to generate a weekly sales report. He says that, "VECTA has given us more transparency. We can drill down from turnover, all the way to type of sale, looking at the customers with whom we are performing well and, perhaps more crucially, where we are not performing, all in a couple of clicks."

Cleary adds, "We can put this information into the hands of the sales people, allowing them to be more informed and prepared before every call which, in turn, means they maximise every selling opportunity."

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In demand

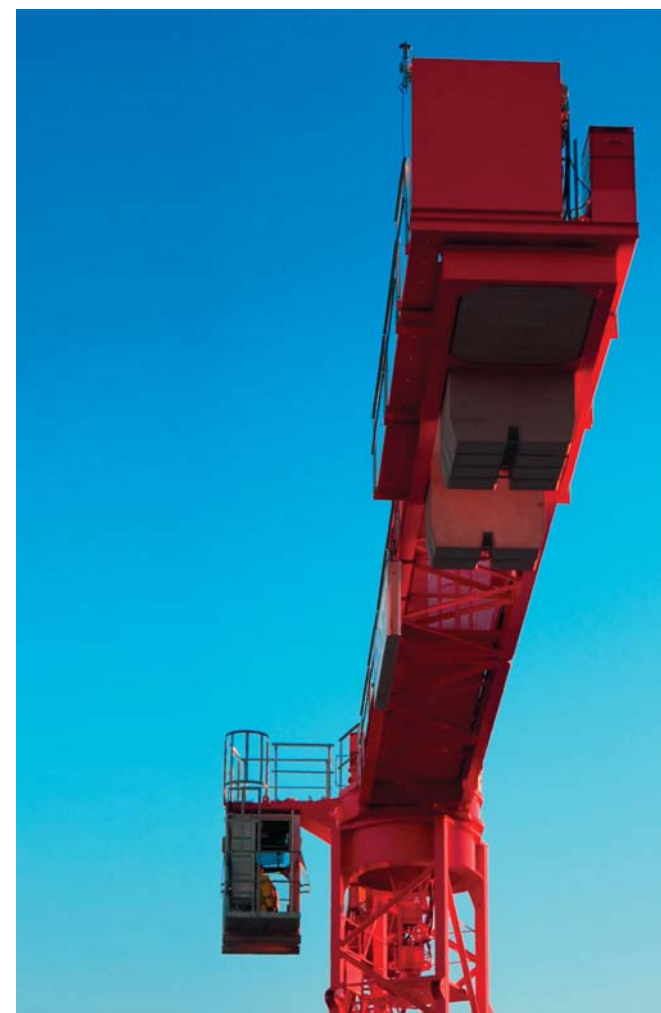
Elliotts had originally planned to roll VECTA out to the sales team in stages, initially to just four of its fifteen strong sales team. However, within weeks it was being used ad hoc by the majority of the team to identify opportunities amongst their customers. VECTA performs analysis of their sales and alerts them to sales opportunities across linked products, for example, correlating paint and paint brush sales or doors and door furniture purchases. This means the sales team can pre-plan their customer calls. Sales managers can also use these features to compare sales between sales people or branches, allowing them to share best practices whilst uncovering problems.

The Elliotts marketing team have also taken to using VECTA to refine their planning for promotions and campaigns, using Sales Intelligence information on opportunities to incentivise additional purchases across ranges or even individual products.

Adding realism

Bryan Eccles, Elliotts' Finance Director is also a VECTA user, he comments, "We bought VECTA as a sales effectiveness tool, but it is also beneficial as a business intelligence tool. Branch managers can analyse their customers in detail, even getting a quick update on purchases as they see the customer on the way into the branch, so that they can anticipate what they need."

He continues, "From a management perspective, VECTA alerts us when a branch is not hitting its targets. We can see exactly which lines are not selling and even understand which customers have stopped buying their usual quantities. Recently we were working on budgets and noted sales were up 50% on a product line in one branch. While obviously we hoped this would continue, we used VECTA to look at the sales patterns and it highlighted that this was due to purchases of a specific product by one customer on a project nearing completion. Without VECTA we would not have spotted that this was not a realistic basis for budgeting for further growth. Using it for budgeting allows us to be more realistic, giving us better buy-in from managers and salespeople as they can see the logic behind the figures – both the quality and speed of the analysis VECTA delivers gives us this extra benefit."



The future

Looking to the future, Eccles is optimistic, "We were going to wait a while until granting everyone access to VECTA, but since implementing the solution we have seen an increase in revenue across key areas, so we plan to roll it out across the whole sales team within the next few months." Elliotts will be equipping each sales person with a ruggedised laptop, loaded with both VECTA and an order processing system that can be taken on site. "This system will enable our sales people to proactively plan sales visits, quote and place orders from the field for any of our 28,000 catalogue items, maximising selling time and allowing us to better understand our customers' business."

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About Vecta Software Corporation Ltd:

Established in 1996, Vecta Software Corporation Ltd provides world-class sales intelligence solutions to hundreds of companies worldwide.

Thousands of salespeople use VECTA sales intelligence tools on a daily basis to dramatically improve their sales performance.

VECTA can boost sales performance in any business that has a quota-bearing sales force that is selling to an account base. The software enables manufacturing, distribution and wholesale companies to significantly improve sales effectiveness and performance. Companies that have already benefited from implementing VECTA include suppliers of office products, computer supplies, automotive products and paints, building products, food and drink, medical supplies, industrial supplies, electrical products and packaging.

VECTA makes salespeople more successful by giving them easy access to vital information about customer buying patterns and account status. The software analyses historical buying patterns to identify issues and opportunities for future sales. Using VECTA, salespeople can eliminate wasted effort and focus on the opportunities that benefit their company most. VECTA can be adapted to existing sales models and can therefore have an immediate impact on sales.

Equipped with VECTA sales intelligence software, companies gain an insight into their customers' buying patterns and can define effective sales strategies. This valuable information helps them to sell more intelligently, improving revenue and margin through increased average order size and increased order volume.



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